

The Soldier as Victim: Peering through the Looking Glass

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Despite a rising criminological interest in the criminogenic context of the Iraq conflict and a focus on the numbers of British veterans in the criminal justice system, a concern to understand the experiences of modern soldiers is largely hidden from the criminological and victimological gaze. This paper addresses this issue by presenting data from interviews with British military veterans and considers their 'unknowable' experiences of war in a framework of victimological otherness: including experiencing, perpetrating and witnessing conflict. Given the masculine connotations associated with 'soldiering', imagining the 'soldier as victim' is challenging given the presumption of vulnerability conjured by the term victim itself. Here we offer an insight into 'victimhood' by centering and analyzing the 'common place' experiences of British soldiers from the conflict in Iraq.

Key Words: Victimology, victim, soldier, Iraq war, conflict

Total word count: 9497

War is among the greatest horrors known to mankind; it should never be romanticized. The means of war is force, applied in the form of organised violence. It is through the use of violence – or the credible threat of violence, which requires the apparent willingness to use it – that we compel our enemy to do our will. In either event, violence is an essential element of war, and its immediate result is bloodshed, destruction and suffering. While the magnitude of violence may vary with the object and means of war, the violent essence of war will never change. Any study of war that neglects this characteristic is misleading and incomplete (Gray 1989: 11).

Introduction

At the time of writing, British armed forces personnel have been engaged in a conflict in Afghanistan for over 10 years. During this time the British military have also started and ended a seven-year conflict in Iraq, experienced over 500 military deaths and suffered scores of physically and psychologically injured personnel in the process. This is nothing new: military personnel have been returning from war for centuries. However, amid a background of political controversy surrounding both the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and a criminological debate increasingly engaged with these issues, the impact of these conflicts on the (predominantly male) soldier¹ has been overlooked. Using testimonies from veterans of the British military, including those who have served in Iraq, this paper will explore how the soldier is being framed contemporarily; first as 'criminal' then as 'victim'. In the light of these constructions, and drawing on interview data, it will be suggested that the increasing

¹ Please note that we use the terms 'soldier' and 'soldiering' throughout this paper in the same way that the Military Covenant does, as a generic reference to all members of the British armed forces (Army, Royal Marines, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy).

visibility of the male soldier as criminal alongside the relative invisibility of the male soldier as victim, in criminology and victimology, reveals much about the limitations inherent in both disciplines and their respective capacity for appreciating the 'invisible' harms done as a result of war. Although it is not our intention to render the experiences of female soldiers invisible, we address these issues in consideration that the majority (90.5%) of the British armed forces population are men, most of those injured and killed in these recent conflicts have been men, and 'The vast majority of veterans in prison are male' (see inter alia Ministry of Defence 2009; BBC News 2011; Willett 2010: 3).

The paper falls into three parts. In the first we review how criminology and victimology have addressed the consequences of war and how male soldiers have been situated and understood within that work. In the second we use Cohen's (2001) concept of the 'atrocities triangle' as a way of framing the war experiences of British soldiers. In the final and concluding part we consider the implications of these voices for the wider criminological and victimological embrace of the criminology of war and the harms experienced by men in the extremis of soldiering.

Criminology, Victimology and War

The origins of the 'criminology of war' can be traced to the work of Jamieson (1998). She argues that war is of interest to criminology because of its potential to produce mass victimisation and because acts of such victimisation and violence perpetrated by state action, also frequently constitute human rights violations. Within this framework she posits several models for interpreting the 'war/crime nexus' including a 'temporary reversal' and 'temporary inversion' of civilised morals during and after conflict, in addition to war operating as a 'school of crime' to perpetuate criminal activity (Jamieson 1999: 25). The war/crime nexus can also be conceived in anomic terms wherein accelerated states of emergency during war result in the production of 'hyper-discipline': the generation of new laws, and thus new crimes and criminal behaviours (Jamieson 1998: 482–483). Furthermore, not only is war said to exaggerate the 'gender order' and encourage violent masculine behaviour, but – as an act of violence – it is mainly conducted by men (Jamieson 1999). Interestingly Jamieson (1998) acknowledges the 'self-referential' nature of criminological analysis in this domain as it focuses on the impacts of war in relation to 'routine' or 'street crimes'. Barton et al. (2007) have also commented on this issue as traditionally limiting criminology's ability to analyse the broader fallout of harm perpetuated outside of criminal justice. Building on these insights Ruggiero (2005: 240) suggests that 'Conventional criminologists have long shied away from the study of war'. In doing so attempts to develop a criminology of war have been restricted, under researched, and under developed (ibid). However some of these restrictions are being lifted.

Jamieson and McEvoy (2005) document the increasingly substantial literature on state crime that covers a broad spectrum of issues relating to the criminality of war. These include: genocide (Hagan and Raymond-Richmond, 2009), war crimes (Hagan and Greer 2002) and sexual violence (Wood 2006; Burds 2009). Recent criminological literature has pursued questions similar to these in relation to Iraq, in a tone more empathetic with the critical stance of Jamieson's (1998) original analysis. Of course, it must be remembered that the Iraq conflict was executed without the support of the

United Nations or the international community and its legality has always been in question. Zolo (2009: 161) reminds us:

From a political standpoint, the power exercised by the civilian and military personnel of the United States and the other contingents present on Iraqi territory is wholly illegitimate. It is a power that was won by a force of arms – at the cost of thousands of Iraqi lives – in a war of aggression that violated both the UN Charter and customary international law

Indeed, Kramer and Michalowski (2005) suggest, such disregard for international co-operation, and the subsequent occupation of Iraq by US and coalition forces, is tantamount to a state crime. They assert that although the relative international power of the US perhaps renders such actions ‘unpunishable’ they are not beyond the scrutiny of criminological analysis (Kramer and Michalowski 2005). Other interventions also put these events squarely within the sphere of criminological interest (see Whyte 2007; Hudson and Walters 2009 and Karstedt, Levi and Ruggiero 2010). Much of this work has been either concerned to demonstrate the criminal nature of the ‘Iraq War’ and its consequences, or to explain the motivations for terrorism or state violence. This connects with the emerging discourse on the criminogenic potential of war and asks questions about the legality of state action itself and the deeds done by agents of the state acting in its name.

Emulating mainstream criminological work, the problem of self-reference referred to above can also be found within much of victimology. As Newburn and Stanko (1994: 158) noted of victimology, ‘it is unable to wrench itself from a simple view of victims and offenders’, and an understanding of hegemonic masculinity in which men are seen to solely victimize women. Walklate (2007b) has suggested that this perspective provides an oversimplified view of victimization, which takes little account of male on male violence or the victimization of men. Therefore the pre-occupation with the law - whether criminal, human rights, or international in focus - as the framing mechanism for understanding who can be ‘criminal’ and who the ‘victim’ limits who and what can be included in both categories (see Quinney 1972). Picking up on this, Karmen (2007: 1) states, ‘Crime victims are harmed by illegal acts’, but adds, ‘People can become victims of accidents, natural disasters, diseases, or social problems like warfare’ (ibid). This position has been developed further by interventions from within radical victimology. For example, Kauzlarich et al. (2001: 175) have suggested that ‘civilians and soldiers in conflict’ can be considered as victims of state crime’ with Ruggiero (2005: 251) adding that ‘soldiers ... while ‘doing their unpleasant, ennobling duty’, are being ‘victimised by State and corporate actors’. Similarly, from military history Holmes (2007: 345) maintains a rationale of what he calls the ‘essential paradox of soldiering’ in which the soldier finds himself ‘being both victim and executioner’. So male soldiers who act on behalf of the state can be viewed as victims or offenders in the context of the presumed ‘exceptional’ circumstances of war. This paradox has been the subject of little scrutiny (Kauslarich et al. 2001; Ruggiero, 2005). Nevertheless those military personnel actually engaged in combat, in what Beck (2009) has dubbed the ‘risk wars’ of Afghanistan and Iraq, have indeed been party to a broad and ambiguous range of political, popular and academic constructions. In what follows we shall subject these ‘framings’ to deeper critical analysis.

Framing the Soldier as 'Criminal'

The atrocities surrounding the Second World War perpetrated by armed forces of all nationalities against each other, as well as against civilians, still constitute a challenge to the construction of the soldier as 'hero'. Moreover the graphic images of Mai Lai brought home to a generation the potential criminality endemic in soldiering. For some the Vietnam War was a turning point that contributed to the recognition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for many of the soldiers who both perpetrated and witnessed atrocities (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). The images from Abu Ghraib, and the increasing awareness of the problematic behaviour of soldiers in Iraq (see for example, The Red Cross 2004; Lilly 2007; Hamm 2007) raise similar questions about the criminality inherent in conflicts fought in the more recent 'War on Terror'.

Within criminology generally, increasing attention has been paid to the range of acts that can be committed by male soldiers in the course of doing their 'duty'. Such acts may include sexual violence directed towards their male and female colleagues (Jeffries 2007) as well as the use of torture and other human rights offences. Furthermore there is evidence of rape and sexual violence against civilians (Lilly 2007; Wood 2006) and other acts associated with genocide, which may or may not be authorized by the state (see amongst others Hagan and Rymond-Richmond 2009). Against this backcloth – as Jamieson (1998) suggests - there has been a rising interest in the extent to which military service itself acts as a bridge to criminality in other spheres of social life. For example, Newby et al. (2005) explored the relationship between men engaging in combat and domestic violence, with Bradley (2007) suggesting that evidence for 'cultural spillover' (the aggressive demands of military culture spilling over into the domestic sphere) is inconclusive. Bouffard (2005) also reports that the evidence for military involvement acting as a turning point for a criminal career is neither simple nor straightforward. Recently in the UK there has been an increasing political and policy awareness of the number of male veterans coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

In a survey conducted by The National Association of Probations Officers (Napo 2009: 1) it was 'found that 12,000 former armed service personnel were under the supervision of the Probation Service in England and Wales on either community sentences or on parole'. Moreover it was reported that an estimated 8,500 British military veterans were in the custody of the criminal justice system at any one time (Napo 2009). Such statistics have gained the attention of criminology (Pritchard 2010; Willett 2010; Treadwell 2010 a & b) with current levels of British veterans estimated to amount to 9.1% of the prison population at any one time (Napo 2008; Treadwell 2010b). Other estimates are more conservative, suggesting that just 3% of the prison population in England and Wales (approximately 2,500 people) are British veterans (Ministry of Defence 2010; Prison Reform Trust 2010). In critiquing this framing of the soldier as 'criminal', Jamieson (1999) was quick to point out that it is questionable whether the sociologizing of war and the military are meaningfully perceived and understood. Similarly, as Treadwell (2010b: 74) has recently suggested, 'it would also be short-sighted to simply reduce the issue of ex-forces personnel in custody to a statistical counting exercise' given the latent impacts that war can have on British soldiers. So, what if we were to step away from this self-referential analysis and frame the male soldier as victim rather than criminal.

Framing the Soldier as 'Victim'

In depicting the experiences of soldiering and war from the poetry of Aleksandr Polezhaev, Layton (1999) describes how the former soldier and poet portrayed himself through his work as a 'victim' of the Russian state whilst conscripted in the Russian army during the early nineteenth century. In a similar vein Prestwich (2003) discusses the physical and psychological effects of the First World War on French soldiers who experienced combat. Repeatedly referring to soldiers as 'victims of war' Prestwich (2003) establishes that a soldier's physical and mental health cannot only be impaired by war but should also be the responsibility of the state. Closer to home, British soldiers who fought and perished in the First and Second World Wars were cast predominantly as heroes and liberators, yet the experiences of former army officer and war poet, Wilfred Owen, suggest something different. Keegan and Holmes (1985: 282) observe Owen's (1917) popular poem, *Dulce et decorum est* depicts the soldier as 'the victim of a gas attack'. They continue by asserting 'the soldier is both victim and executioner. Not only does he run the risk of being killed and wounded himself, but he also kills and wounds others' (Keegan and Holmes 1985: 266). The cultural enshrinement of 'military victimhood' (Layton, 1999: 566) evident in such depictions suggest further questions about the experiences of British soldiers serving in more recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. As Barker (1992: 115) astutely reminds us: 'as soon as you accepted that the man's breakdown was a consequence of his war experience rather than his own innate weakness, then inevitably the war became the issue.'

Military victimhood has become increasingly common in contemporary media reporting in the U.K on Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, the death of the 126th British soldier in Afghanistan in November 2008 was described as 'Helmand victim' (Cramb 2008: 10); the most senior officer to be killed in Afghanistan, Lieutenant Colonel Thorneloe, was named as one of the 'many victims of the Taliban' (Steele 2009: 11); and one of the most recent soldiers to die in Afghanistan in June 2010 was displayed on the front of *The Sunday Telegraph* below the title '299th victim' (Hennessy 2010: 1). The shift toward identifying the soldier as a victim is also reflected in political exchanges and enshrined in law. In 2006 *The Daily Telegraph* led with the story of British soldiers being defined as 'victims of crime' for compensation purposes when injured in Afghanistan and Iraq due to the asymmetrical tactics being employed on them by insurgents which fall outside the confines of 'just war' tactics (Rayment 2006).

However, framing the soldier as victim poses a number of conundrums and contradictions. Certainly the social and cultural expectations traditionally associated with soldiering do not lend themselves easily to the connotations of victimisation that imply vulnerability, weakness and passivity (Rock 2007). A soldier is framed as the epitome of normative heterosexuality (see Walklate 2007b): very much a 'non-victim' endowed with the capacity for the use of brute force and resilience. However, as suggested above, in victimological 'self-reference' the male constitutes the 'other' of mainstream victimological thought (Walklate 2007a); outside the conceptual framework of victimhood though not necessarily outside the experience of victimisation. The harms males experience in general are frequently reduced to a 'latent invisibility' (Walklate 2007b) perhaps paralleling the experiences of personnel from the predominantly male, white, British armed forces. However it would be

unfair to suggest that the harms faced by modern soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq are hidden or invisible. Thomson (1999 cited in Green and Troup 1999: 251) suggests that the Vietnam War and subsequent anti-war peace movements have assisted in making the 'the soldier as victim' more acceptable to public perceptions. Throughout the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq victim imagery has been regularly captured by television documentaries, often presenting a range of harms experienced by male soldiers including the pains of family separation, the social consequences of war post-conflict and its long-term psychological effects. Such is the popularity of these types of programmes, *Wounded* (see Aldous 2009) – a documentary of the recovery of two young, white, male amputee British soldiers from Afghanistan - won a BAFTA for Best Single Documentary in 2010. Therefore the harms experienced by soldiers are not 'invisible' as the scenes at (now Royal) Wootton Bassett would testify, and 'Whilst the narrative of the soldier as hero remains, it has been twinned with a seemingly paradoxical emphasis on the soldier as victim' (XXXX forthcoming).

So this framing process for modern soldiers as victims is not a straightforward one, especially when imagined against the backdrop of a growing critical criminological analysis of the war in Iraq. Perhaps the most dominant representation of harm suffered to British soldiers serving in Afghanistan and Iraq is impairments to their mental health. Since 2004 there has been a groundswell of research investigating a range of psychological impacts on British soldiers resulting from conflict. These include PTSD (see for example, Hoge and Castro 2006; Rona et al. 2006; Iverson et al. 2008), alcohol misuse and anxiety disorder (see Jones et al. 2006; Iverson and Greenberg 2009) and incidents of suicide (Fear 2003) to name but a few. In criminology the psychological impact of their experiences in conflict; in particular the 'hidden wound' of PTSD (Treadwell 2010b: 76) is seen as the key push factor leading male British veterans into the criminal justice system. Whilst the psychological problems faced by ex-service personnel have long been known (Fassin and Rechtman 2009), obtaining recognition of, and an appropriate response to, these and other difficulties encountered by veterans is still fraught with problems despite the development and adoption of the 'military covenant' (see Ministry of Defence 2001, 2005). Moreover, Treadwell (2010b: 73) reminds us:

the other casualties of war are, perhaps, those soldiers who return seemingly physically healthy after military service, and the unfortunate people who, at some unspecified point in the future will become victims of their crime

The prevailing research that focuses on imprisonment and PTSD inevitably detracts attention from these 'others'. Jamieson (1999) notes, few of the criminological literatures concerning themselves with war have been interested in the more banal activities of military life or conflict. So it is worth turning our attention to British soldiers who have had such experiences but not 'officially' suffered as a result, or perhaps suffered at all; those who do not have criminal records and are without the diagnosis of a psychological impairment. Instead they are those who have experienced both the traumatic and residual impacts of conflict in a more commonplace way.

'Doing what soldiers do': hearing the voices of male veterans

The narrative voices that follow in this analysis were gathered as part of the first authors PhD research carried out between 2008 and 2009. In total there were 6

participants (A–F) who are all British military veterans. Participants A to E had all served in one or more conflicts, including Iraq between 2003 and 2006. Participant F had not served in Iraq but had previous experience serving in Northern Ireland and the first Gulf War. Each participant was interviewed about their former experiences in the British armed forces and service in conflict using a variant of Wengraf's (2001) Biographical-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), influenced by the techniques of Schutze (1992). The interview sample included service in a broad range of roles, both combat and support, and presented here are the male participants, including: 3 from the Army (B, D and E), 1 from the Royal Air Force (A) and 1 who had served in both the Royal Navy and Royal Marines (F). In analyzing harm Cohen (2001: 14) describes an 'atrocities triangle' in which there are three agents: first, the 'victim' who suffers from the direct act of an atrocity; second, 'perpetrators' who carry out acts of atrocity to cause suffering; and third, 'observers' who witness atrocities happening. We use this triangle, in the context of conflict not atrocity as a heuristic device, to frame our respondents' testimonies. However, as shall be seen, the boundaries between victim, perpetrator, and observer become permeable when we centre the ordinariness of soldiering. So first, it is worth exploring what the day-to-day experiences of conflict are like for these soldiers.

Experiencing Iraq

A soldier's experience of military service and conflict presents us with an unfamiliar territory of discipline and violence, knowledge of which - for those who have never experienced either first hand - will largely be constructed from popular literature (Mills 2008), media representations (Conroy 2008) or Hollywood movies (Becsey et al. 2007). As a general overview participants A and B provide an insight into the intense and violent nature of Iraq; commenting on their experiences in the early stages of the conflict in 2003 they state,

one minute you're having a laugh and a joke with your mates at the back of an accommodation block with your feet up, you know...sunbathing and what have you and then the next minute you're in god knows what temperature and god knows how much kit...driving up a motorway getting shot at by a fucking young kid

And we were out there, and you're waiting and you're waiting, but then the elements of realism do start coming into it, so when we got scudded out there...these sort of flaming telegraph poles go scooting across the sky, and you're like that, 'right, we're all about to melt because of the NBC (Nuclear, Biological, Chemical) threat' ...its not until you hear that going to the desert, that I'm not that far away. Pandemonium through the camp instantly, I've never seen anything like it...that really really brought it home to everybody hearing that go on.

This violence was often punctuated with other 'elements of realism' of actually going to, or being at war. As participants B and D highlight,

there were times that...it just gets underlined, like before we went over the border, before it properly started and you had to burn personal correspondence and stuff like that in case you got captured, its like, 'wow, this is it'

bu-bu-bum (imitates firing weapon)...and then, you know after that...you just, listening to the rounds just come over your head and firing back...it brings it home that its not a computer game its real

As might be expected in conflict most participants also experienced hostilities first hand by being shot at, affectionately described by participant B as being on 'two-way range'. Participants A and B state,

we came under contact (fired upon) from a bridge...and I remember when we looked at this bridge...he must have been about fourteen-fifteen years old this Iraqi kid with a forty seven (AK47 rifle) blatting off rounds willy nilly, then he saw the convoy, now whether or not he was...aiming at us because we were British forces or whether he was aiming at us because it was a vehicle to aim at and you know he'd got a gun and he thought it was great fun, which is more likely because of his age you know... I don't think he was purposely trying to kill the people in the van he was just shooting at us because he was Iraqi and we weren't.

As I go to that (position) its a roundabout therefore its in the middle of the road, every fucker saw me run to it, so I got down behind that and everyone, it just seemed to me like everybody who had an AK (AK47 rifle) in Iraq was shooting at me at that point...which I do remember distinctly because I'm pinned down and every time I tried to get up you can feel it sort of coming past...then you sort of build up the courage to feel like you're running though mud to get back to where the rest of the blokes where

Williams and Smith (1949) note conflict also has additional less acknowledged stressful features. Physical discomfort, particularly lack of sleep and decent food are pertinent issues. Participants B and D note that apart from Iraq being a dangerous operational environment, it was also hazardous to an individual's health for non-violent reasons,

you're just tired constantly, I've never experienced sort of fatigue of that nature because you gotta keep going, gotta keep the pressure up...it had been a stressful couple of days up to there, you're just exhausted all the time when you're on proper operations like that

the lads where getting blasted, you cant maintain that level of intensity for that long, you need a break, you know and all credit to them, to the lads and lasses that do it, its just, you know remarkable that their bodies take it for as long as they do.

The violent nature of the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are summed-up well by participant F who states that 'everybody that's out there at the moment who... steps foot on that dusty country is fair target... there is nowhere safe.' This feeling of being 'fair game' was experienced by several participants (A, B and D) commenting on the induced feelings of mortality that this sort of environment presents an individual with,

they said 'we haven't got you recorded as leaving theatre', so 'well I've just got back for a weeks R and R' (rest and recuperation), so admin was shocking, absolutely shocking, which, in the back of your mind you think 'well what if I'd have been fucking taken out?', 'pinged off?', who the fuck would have known, know what I mean?

when you were laying in your trench at night and...its screaming and you're bouncing off the floor listening to this shit going on, and you're thinking, 'what's to say this dickhead in the dark' because we're all exhausted 'hasn't done it again and we're just gunna get vaporised'. And that was the first time I was properly scared was just from our own artillery.

when people died you sort of panicked, scared about it and sort of, you think 'this is shit', you know, I'm coming out, you know, it is war but you just didn't expect it

Such observations bring into focus some of the more 'unknowable' pressures experienced by military personnel in conflict and allow us to suggest that British soldiers are 'Those who fall outside the normative imagery of theory and practice' with regards to victimization (Walklate 2007a: 53). With this victimological 'otherness' in mind, Holmes' (2007: 345) 'essential paradox of soldiering' begins to carry some weight: in this environment the soldier can be 'both victim and executioner'.

Perpetrating in Iraq

The complex burden of killing is one that participant B encountered during his time in Iraq when engaging in his first fire-fight. Having discovered an Iraqi combatant shooting at British forces he took aim with his rifle and fired in his direction, he continues,

I'll be honest I was disappointed with myself because I could have shot him, and then that leads to very weird feeling afterwards thinking 'why am I disappointed that I haven't killed somebody who's obviously got a family?' Erm...fucking annoying that I hadn't done my job, even though your job was to kill that individual...I didn't intend to do the right thing...that instinct just was not there

On reflection, his decision not to kill – to his mind – was the right one because of the consequences it could have had for him,

Now I am glad afterwards, with hindsight, that I didn't (shoot the insurgent) because he would have been laying there and I'd have been able to see him, I'd have seen his head come apart, and then you're living with that for the rest of your life, you would have had to watch his kids...and his wife going mad trying to drag him back into the alley way and stuff like that...you don't fucking need to live with that.

Quite differently Bourke (1999) suggests that men – once trained as soldiers – come to enjoy the act of killing in conflict, functioning as a means of releasing psychological tension. Holmes (2004) provides an alternative perspective detailing a

range of aspects in the 'mêlée' of killing during war, from the rare but brutal use of bayonets, to the benefits of de-humanising the enemy prior to engaging in combat. As a result Holmes (2004: 377) states that 'the sensations which accompany the first kill (in war) can be traumatic', evident in the example above. Similarly, if electing to kill during combat, Grossman (1995) suggests it is a burden so strong most soldiers and veterans try not to admit it to themselves. The experiences of participant B is an exceptional dilemma that very few people will ever experience: hence its victimological otherness. On the one hand participant B is perplexed at his own disappointment at not having killed another human being; on the other he is frustrated at himself for not doing his job. He is essentially torn within the 'essential paradox of soldiering'. Does he morally 'do the right thing' for himself by not wanting to kill, or accept the moral agreement of his role as a soldier: to fight and if necessary, kill.

As perpetrators in conflict, soldiers also fulfill 'the consummation of their training' through engaging with enemy soldiers (Keegan and Holmes 1985: 261). What this 'consummation' largely involves, is both being shot at, and shooting at others as described by participants B and D who recount their reactions to being faced with the enemy shooting at them,

stuff happens in situations like that (combat) and you have emotions and stuff overtaking you because you're fucking furious people are shooting at you...I consider myself quite a level headed person, but when, if you like for want of a better word, when the madness sort of takes hold...and you're going for it, erm yeah, you do things

you're trying to stay alive, and its not just you...you're trying to keep people alive, and...in the back of your head that's what you're doing, and that's what...justifies you pulling the trigger

These reactions are characteristic of survival and, having 'justified' their actions and engaged with the enemy in this way, participant B articulates the omission of electing to kill openly and evenly. He states,

I'm not a fucking baby murderer...I would never do anything like that...I am, like most people, a reasonable rounded sort of individual who's been put in situations, that I've chose to volunteer myself for, and done what I see fit. And that's how you sleep at night isn't it? I don't have to be all bravado and all the rest of it because I've done things I shouldn't have done, I've done what I should have done, limited my actions, not killed people that shouldn't have been killed, killed people that should have been fucking killed and deserved to be killed, and that's that

Once again, the otherness of this experience presents itself in a paradox: an individual who considers himself 'reasonable' in a dangerous situation that forces him to rationalize the act of killing. This decision then is far from a simple process, especially given a soldier's reliance on the rules of engagement to ensure their actions - which would be considered as murder in a non-conflict situation - are that of a 'just combatant' (Bowman-Larsen, 2004). Participant D reminds us of this with a sobering thought,

it goes through...everybody's head before they pull the trigger, they go through their (rules of engagement) card, they make sure they're doing the right thing coz if you get it wrong its murder...and its you that's gotta live with it...in your own mind, you don't want any grey areas

Witnessing in Iraq

Williams and Smith (1949 cited in Stouffer et al. 1949: 76-77) note that participating in combat does not just mean adjusting to the possibility of killing, 'but also adjustment to danger, to frustration, to uncertainty, to noise and confusion'. In relation to US soldiers during the Second World War they highlight a number 'stresses' experienced in combat including the loss of colleagues and the sights and sounds of people wounded or dying (Williams and Smith 1949). Despite being engaged in fighting the enemy and risking their lives and injury, participant D enthuses, 'we we're in a battle, we were fighting, we were doing what soldiers do', which according to participant B was what he had 'joined the army to do and that was fighting bad guys'. However, what is questionable is whether they were prepared to witness repugnant scenes during conflict. This is either expected by virtue of the requirement to kill, or not spoken of due to the abhorrence such scenes contain. Participant B recalls attending the scene of an Iraqi father and son who had been killed by insurgents he states,

by the time we got there they were properly dead and burnt as well...his fucking brains had come out and fried on the back of his head because they'd been sort of tapped on the skull...that wasn't very nice...it was weird the stuff you see, how people burn and stuff like that, you could see his stomach had opened up and he'd been executed as well, but some of it had burnt, some of it had remained completely normal so you were looking at like a school biology sort of model of the insides of a person. But...he was obviously only a little boy...

Similarly participant E described the scenes recounted by a fellow soldier who had engaged in a gun battle in Iraq in an attempt to rescue a colleague from a burning vehicle, leaving a lasting impact on him,

he was able to get himself out and under cover behind a wall or something but then realized that somebody else was still trapped inside the vehicle which was then being heavily fired upon...he used pretty much all of his hundred rounds trying to take out as many enemy as he could before...he then felt safe enough to go back to the vehicle...it turned out that the guy...he extracted...was in a burning vehicle and he was very badly burned and... he had memories of this guys skin sticking to the seat of the vehicle as he removed him

Such acts of witnessing - as Peters (2001) informs us - is a 'tangled' event involving experience, pain, death, and seeing. In relation to conflict, witnessing with our eyes and ears comes with 'weighty baggage' for those observing, in particular those observing 'atrocities' (Peters 2001). Participant B provides further insight into yet another paradoxical experience of soldiering; describing an incident whereby a tank overturned into shallow water in non-violent circumstances killing a fellow soldier. He explains,

I'd never seen anybody drown before and its quite horrible...because he drowned in mud...ah it was a fucking mess, and my overriding memory of that specifically is seeing, because obviously you're down to skin so you can check for injuries but all the veins had gone blue so it looks like all the veins had expanded, looks like something out of a horror film, clagged with shit you know all the mud and stuff like that he'd taken in

The extent of British service personnel facing similar scenes has been estimated at 45% of regular soldiers and 49% of reservists witnessing personnel killed or wounded whilst on duty in Iraq (Browne et al. 2007). Pols and Oak (2007: 2133) remind us that 'Witnessing acts of warfare, including killing, torture, and widespread devastation, can be severely upsetting. It can also have severe mental health consequences for military personnel', a point reinforced by Bowling and Sherman (2008). Although none of the participants presented here had been diagnosed with a psychological impairment, it is not to say that their experiences were not 'severely upsetting'. Participant D offers a lasting somber account of a young British soldier, he states,

I saw a young guy die in...Iraq, three days into tour, he was shot in the back coming off guard...saw him fall out the...sangan (fortified shelter), his mate caught him...and when you heard him shout 'medic'...the way his voice sounded you knew it was all over...you could see he was gone, there was nothing there, his eyes were empty.

Expanding the Victimological Imagination

So soldiering can be a dangerous and bad experience: why should this be of interest to criminology and/or victimology? First, experiences such as those presented here, were commonplace for British soldiers who served in Iraq and continue to be so for those who serve in Afghanistan; particularly given that in both environments 'every location is a potential battle zone, and military personnel serving there are continuously at risk of being wounded or killed' (Manderscheid 2007: 122). Second what these everyday encounters of experiencing, perpetrating and witnessing do, in terms of victimological otherness, is enable us the challenge the incipient victim-offender dualism around veteran's criminality and allow us to suggest that the harms British soldiers experience are not invisible but go on 'behind our backs' (Walklate 2007a). Third, appreciating the victimological otherness of soldiering revives Jamieson's (1999: 26) explorations of war when she stated: 'Like most violent crime, war is 'bad'. It is mainly conducted by men. But there is more to be said.' Whilst, as the Howard League (2011) reports, most veterans reintegrate into society very effectively, there is indeed more to be said.

First, we must look towards our own initial analysis. Grossman (1995: 87) problematizes the role of the soldier by proposing that 'The soldier in combat is trapped within this tragic Catch-22', if a soldier chooses to kill the enemy then he will live with the consequences indefinitely, however if a soldiers does not then he will still be burdened with the guilt of other fellow soldiers who died or were injured around him. Participant D expresses this through feelings of anger and sadness at the death of a colleague, he explains:

Redemption was in mind of everybody and then obviously the sorrow and grief of losing him

What this suggests is that a soldier's experiences in conflict transcend the parameters we have set out here. For soldiers conflict is also about bonding, loss and suffering; but perhaps a suffering cut through with a certain resilience, as participant B explains when a number of his platoon were shot and injured in a helicopter,

I'm glad it wasn't me...had they stuck to the plan and we'd been on the chopper that would have been us but I don't really entertain that because its pointless speculating, it wasn't us, it was them...luckily none of them died...Wounded's better than dead, no matter what way you look at it, I don't care what anybody says, wounded's better than dead

Whilst this perhaps captures Wilkinson's (2005: 16) observations on the 'unsharability' of suffering, it also significantly captures the importance of appreciating the way in which people experience their suffering (ibid.:3). Consequently we should also consider what happens to soldiers after their service. Napo (2009) analysed a sample of case files of ex-servicemen held by probation officers. From this sample Napo (2009) reported alcohol and drug use as the most common issues for British veterans in prison and domestic violence as the most common reason for conviction. In addition, probation staff observed a number of cases of PTSD, depression and behavioural issues and, although operational service was not recorded in every case, many veterans had served in Afghanistan and/or Iraq (Napo 2009). Given that this survey was conducted in 2009, it lends some support to the view that the harm done during service can take some time to reveal itself in civilian life. This needs to be considered alongside the observations of Hoge et al. (2004) who report on the stigma towards mental health problems within military cultures that create barriers to help seeking for serving soldiers. As participant E suggests,

In a male population you can expect that people will suffer in silence before they'll go to their GP...anything psychological...puts people off seeking help because its a sign of weakness and I think that's just amplified a little bit in a military male, well predominantly male, population

Thus a British soldier's personal resilience and resistance to seek help may continue from military to civilian life. Participant F reflects on the lasting impacts of his military career,

What goes on behind closed doors...it took me ages, years to settle down to family life having come from doing what I've done and that wasn't because...of the fun and frolics I had, that was because of the baggage I brought with me when I came out its not something that leaves you, you just learn to cope with it.

British soldiers then - by virtue of their service - may often be unaware that they may have suffered victimization as a consequence of their experiences. Participant D notes,

The way I see it with the forces is you're not a victim if you get caught (injured/killed) coz, at the end-eh-day its what you were there to do, you know its not good...its not nice, but...life's not nice is it.

Such 'victim responsiveness' (Geis 1973), adds an additional layer to a soldier's inability to imagine himself as vulnerable. When this is twinned with the normative masculinity associated with soldiering, the harms experienced by British soldiers become liminal. Participant B explains,

The victim side of it, obviously elicits a negative response from people, 'I'm not a fucking victim, I'm in control of my own destiny', are you a survivor? Ehh, yeah, different way of looking at it...different words have very different meanings and carry different weight

Conclusion: Peering through the Looking Glass

The analysis presented here centres the ordinariness of soldiering during conflict, perhaps in opposition of Bourke's (1999:16) suggestion that war is 'seductive', albeit because of its unreal qualities. Our observations intimate that experiences of conflict are unknowable to those who do not experience them. However British soldiers who do, are confronted with a range of consequences. At the extreme some soldiers face psychological 'discomforts' or even suicide (Kapur et al. 2009). For others the transition from military to civilian life causes issues of reintegration (McGarry 2010) and homelessness (Johnsen, Jones and Rugg 2008). However soldiers may also experience conflict in more 'common-place' ways, either unknowing of the extent of the harms they have encountered, or facing barriers to the care they may require. This supports the view that not only are we 'not spending enough time preparing our soldiers for life when they leave' (Elfyn Llwyd MP quoted in The Guardian, 5.6.10) the military, we clearly do not know enough about the extent of the harm done in the service of the state, or the social and psychological costs suffered by British veterans.

Much like the participants in this paper, whilst the majority of British veterans may be without publicly recognized psychological or emotional impairments it does not mean that they are without experiences. Recognition of this allows us to frame the unique nature of soldiering for British troops in a larger and more ambiguous concept of otherness. It may be the case then that on the one hand soldiers genuinely cope with what they have seen and done during conflict by drawing on the training and resilience instilled within them by the British military. However, British soldiers may be subject to 'victim responsiveness' for exactly those same reasons (Geis 1973). In presenting the testimonies of these participants our concern has been to bring to the fore the extent to which the everyday nature of their experiences renders much of what is expected of them invisible. For the new criminological interest in the over-representation of British veterans in the prison system this is a key point departure where there is more to be said. This interest, as currently constituted, reflects a 'failing to arrive at a satisfactory account of what suffering does to people' (Wilkinson 2005: 162).

Further this paper contends that criminological and victimological research needs to look beyond the domain assumptions of crime per se and explore the experiences of those who may be on the fringes of the discipline, but are nonetheless very much

within its capacity to understand. Here we have provided a starting point in one of many 'blind-spots' of the criminological and victimological gaze. In following Quinney (1972) and Elias (1986: 131), who suggested:

We cannot overestimate the enormous impact of victimization on people's lives. Yet, as significant as the effects we have described may be, they still understate the overall victimization suffered. We will suggest that we cannot appreciate the true burden of victimization until we employ broader indicators of victimization that transcend our narrow criminal definition. In other words, we should consider applying more universal standards of human rights.

This is why a criminology/victimology of war carries weight. There is considerable mileage, in peering through the criminological and victimological looking glass, in challenging the myths surrounding criminality in general and the victimization of men in particular. This constitutes a real challenge to the self-referential dominance within criminology and victimology. In placing the testimonies of the commonplace experiences of these British veterans up against the criminological and victimological looking glass, we have been concerned to challenge the dualistic thinking of the male soldier as either criminal or victim; adding some detail to Jamieson's (1999: 26) observation that 'there is more to be said'. Of course, giving voice to these soldiers' experiences also carries moral and political consequences for criminology but especially victimology. Challenging 'victimological otherness' implies challenging the deep self-referential grip that crime and positivism have had on that area of study. Once aware of this challenge there is no room for retreat, making an exception, or abdicating responsibility (McEvoy and Jamieson 2007).

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